

Hi everyone. Tonight I'll be doing a little guided meditation that focuses on breathing as an anchor. First, I'd like to start out by explaining why we meditate. So for me, there's two real reasons why I meditate. The first is that it relaxes the parasympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic system is responsible for the rest and digest functions in the body, which is a counterbalance to fight, flight, and freeze functions. So in other words, is a fancy way of saying it helps relax our body.

The second reason I meditate. Is that it trains my mind to notice when it's shifted away from what it's focused on, which is a really natural thing to experience. So throughout the day when I'm being mindful of something that is not meditation, we call informal practice, it helps me notice when my mind is drifted into thought.

One of the most important parts of meditation is that you're in a comfortable position that you can remain relatively still in for the duration of your meditation. I like to recommend about 20 minutes of meditation, but if you're just starting out and wanna start with a five minute meditation, or even a one minute meditation, that's really fine.

When we meditate, we focus our attention on an anchor, sometimes also called an "object of concentration". It's a way of focusing on our present moment experience, and something that we can always come back to when we drift away from that, which is just an inevitable outcome with human minds. Even very experienced meditators, uh, go through this.

We'll begin with one of the most common anchors, which is focusing on the breath. Some of us breathe differently than others. Some of us have compromised breathing or maybe use a ventilator or other device to breathe. Remember that there's no right way to breathe. And unless it causes you discomfort to focus on your breath, any way that you breathe is just fine. It's just how you breathe.

Everything I say is just a suggestion, not an instruction. Okay, let's begin. I'm going to start the meditation by ringing a bell one time. And I'll ring it three times to end the meditation. But I'll warn you before I do so.

[BELL RINGS]

If it's comfortable for you, you can begin by closing your eyes. If not, you can lower your gaze or focus on a single point, something not too distracting like a wall. Briefly check in with your body. Are there any shifts that you can make to make yourself more comfortable? Are there any places in your body where you're holding on tension that you can let go of, even just a little bit?

Begin by taking a few deep breaths, focusing on the inhale and the exhale. If it helps, you can think the words "in" on the inhale, and "out" on the exhale. After a few intentional breaths, you can let go of the intentional breathing and just let your body breathe on its own.

Notice where you're feeling your breath. There are a few ways to concentrate on your breath. You can focus on the air coming in and out of your nostrils. Often you'll find that your inhales are cool and your exhales are warm.

Alternatively, you can focus on the rise and fall of your chest or also your belly.

Maybe you notice your breath in a different part of your body, and that's fine too. Just focus wherever you notice it.

There's no need to control your breath. Just let it happen naturally.

As you focus on an anchor. You'll notice that thoughts will arise and distract you from your breath, this is a very normal experience. Just allow your thoughts to pass you by like clouds in the sky, and when you realize that you've drifted away from your breath, just bring your attention back to the practice without judgment.

Many teachers say that the noticing and returning is actually the most important part of the meditation.

Another thing that you might notice. Is that some breaths are long, others are short, and others still are somewhat in between. None of our breaths are exactly the same length. Just make a gentle note of these without judgment.

Whatever you're experiencing this moment is totally okay.

In and out.

In and out.

I'm going to leave you in silence for a little while and I'll come back to remind you of your practice in a few moments.

[Halfway Point]

We're about halfway through the practice now. This is just a gentle reminder that if your mind has drifted away, first of all, this is very normal and even to be expected, and second of all, just to gently bring yourself back to your breath. There's no need to beat yourself up or think that you're doing things wrong.

Just refocus on your breath. And you'll have to do this many times over the course of meditation, especially at first. So don't get caught up in how many times you're doing it.

[One minute remaining]

In a moment, you'll hear my bell ring three times. When you do very gently come back to the room, there's no rush. You can slowly open your eyes if they've been closed. Stretch out a little bit. Just be very gentle with yourself, and when the meditation ends, there's no report card. Whatever happened was just fine.

Don't take credit or blame for how the meditation went. The most important thing that you did was to meditate in the first place. So even if it was messy and your mind was all over the place, the intention of practice and following through is the most important part of the meditation experience.

[BELL RINGS TO END MEDITATION]

Thanks for your practice everyone.